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Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

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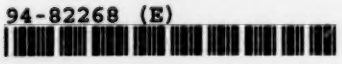

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (A/49/381, A/49/444, A/49/446 and A/49/536)

1. Mr. FALL (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Coordinator for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People), introducing agenda item 103 entitled "Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People", recalled that the Decade had been proclaimed by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, in 1993, in line with the recommendation made by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993. The Decade would be officially inaugurated on 8 December 1994 at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly, but the preparatory activities had already begun.

2. Over the past 12 months, Governments, indigenous people and other interested parties had been requested to hold consultations in order to consider activities for the Decade. At the regional and international levels, a number of meetings had been organized and suggestions for a possible programme had been developed. In particular, the Government of Bolivia had hosted a regional preparatory meeting in June 1994 and the Centre for Human Rights had organized a Technical Meeting on the International Year and the International Decade, from 20 to 22 July; the recommendations of that meeting had been considered by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at its twelfth session.

3. The results of those consultations were described in the preliminary report of the Secretary-General on a comprehensive programme of action for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/49/444) which was before the Committee; the three annexes of the report contained draft programmes and themes for 1995 and 1996 and for the rest of the Decade. A final report of the Secretary-General on the question would be submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, in 1995, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/163.

4. He drew attention to a number of points made in the report. First, information-sharing was essential among the key partners, namely national committees, focal points in the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and indigenous people themselves, so that the latter would have all the elements they needed in order to take the best possible advantage of the Decade. The report therefore recommended that a mechanism should be established to improve communications and that information tools (a video on the Decade, information packs and publications) should be prepared. Furthermore, United Nations organs and agencies could produce a guide on their activities and on ways in which indigenous people could access their services.

5. Second, indigenous people needed to be included in the activities of the Decade in innovative ways. It was therefore suggested in the report that the Centre for Human Rights should establish a fellowship scheme for qualified individuals from indigenous populations, particularly young people, so that they could receive training in the Centre; such a scheme could also be extended to

other parts of the United Nations. It was hoped that Governments would provide the necessary funds for the recruitment of indigenous consultants as they had during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, in 1993.

6. Third, it was vital for indigenous people to be consulted on a regular basis throughout the Decade. For that reason, it was recommended in the report that, in July 1995, a second technical meeting should be held to consider the final programme of activities for the Decade to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, in 1995. Such consultations, in each case focusing on a particular theme of development, could be held annually. It would also be helpful to form an advisory group, including indigenous experts, to provide assistance to the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade.

7. Fourth, there was a need to ensure that the recommendations on indigenous people approved by the General Assembly were fully reflected in the programmes of the agencies and bodies of the United Nations because the success of the Decade would depend on the efforts they made within their respective areas of competence. Inter-agency cooperation, which was also vital to the success of the Decade, was well established; the international and regional organizations of the United Nations system would meet soon at Geneva, under the auspices of the International Labour Organization, to consider modalities for such cooperation.

8. Fifth, it was essential for adequate financing to be made available for the activities of the Decade if the objectives that had been established were to be reached. It was therefore hoped that Member States would contribute substantially and consistently to the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade and other special funds and programmes of the United Nations established for indigenous people.

9. Mr. FLORES OLEA (Mexico) said that on the basis of language alone, the indigenous peoples of Mexico consisted of about 8 million people, in addition to groups which, although no longer speaking their own languages, had maintained their identity, cultural heritage, social organization and institutions.

10. For a long time, those people had led wretched lives, and therefore, for several decades now, his Government had been trying to secure recognition of their existence and their rights and improve their living conditions. The Mexican Constitution had recently been amended to recognize the multicultural nature of the nation. From now on, under article 4 of the Constitution, the languages, cultures, usages, customs and specific forms of social organization of the indigenous peoples had to be protected and developed and those peoples had to be assured the possibility of defending their rights in the courts. In recent years, his Government had established 133 regional development funds for those peoples, and about 5 million people were benefiting from them. His Government had also ensured that those peoples were provided with water and electricity and had access to educational and health services, encouraged job creation for their benefit, established infrastructures to enable them to carry out productive activities and ensured that their demands in respect of justice, human rights and the environment were met.

11. In order to carry out those activities, his Government was relying on the national commission for integral development and social justice for the indigenous peoples which it had established in early 1994 and on other bodies formed earlier and was involving the indigenous peoples in the development and implementation of policies concerning them, thereby establishing cooperation with those peoples rather than paternalistic relations. Undeniable progress had thus been made but much still remained to be done because the indigenous peoples were still, for the most part, very poor. His Government was aware of that situation, and also knew that the settlement of their problems was essential for the current and future stability of Mexico.

12. His delegation welcomed enthusiastically the proclamation of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and hoped that the activities conducted within the framework of the Decade would significantly improve the situation of all indigenous peoples of the world. It had considered the preliminary report of the Secretary-General on a comprehensive programme of action for the Decade (A/49/444) and believed that it contained very constructive proposals. However, it would have wished to see the report deal with certain basic aspects of the development of indigenous people, international cooperation and the resources which would be necessary to ensure such development and the means of financing the projects formulated by indigenous peoples themselves. It also believed that the short-term programmes of activities for the Decade should be biennial and should deal with the themes outlined in General Assembly resolution 48/163, namely human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

13. His delegation noted with concern the insufficient level of contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, which was to finance those activities. It proposed seeking additional means of financing.

14. In conclusion, his delegation would participate actively, within the Commission on Human Rights, in the drafting of the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and it supported the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system. Such a forum should enable indigenous people from all parts of the world to express their views and to participate in the work of United Nations bodies.

15. Ms. TOMKINSON (Australia) noted the very difficult situation of indigenous peoples in contemporary society. Those peoples, whose cultures were too often not recognized, continued to be oppressed and marginalized. Their living conditions, and particularly their health conditions, were deplorable. All that fully justified the growing attention they were receiving from the international community.

16. Certain aspects of those issues had been addressed at Vienna in 1993 by the World Conference on Human Rights and by the indigenous representatives in the context of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. Pursuant to one of the recommendations of the Conference concerning the promotion of the rights of indigenous people, the General Assembly, at its forty-eighth session,

had proclaimed an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, commencing officially on 10 December 1994.

17. The lesson to be learnt from the International Year was that only careful planning and close coordination of the activities undertaken by Governments, United Nations agencies and indigenous people would lead to lasting solutions to the problems confronting indigenous peoples.

18. Australia welcomed the fact that indigenous representatives had had an opportunity to express their views on the Decade and its objectives during the Technical Meeting held at Geneva in July and the meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. It supported, in particular, the recommendation to observe an International Day of Indigenous People every year on 9 August, the anniversary of the first meeting of the Working Group.

19. The draft programme of activities for the Decade submitted as a result of those meetings should be considered more carefully and refined by the Commission on Human Rights in 1995. A second technical meeting should also be held immediately prior to the thirteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in order to ensure that indigenous representatives could express their concerns and that those concerns would be taken into account in the elaboration of the final programme of activities to be adopted by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

20. As the Working Group had completed work on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, that draft should be submitted to the Commission on Human Rights. The objectives and activities of the Decade should take its provisions fully into account. Consideration of the draft should proceed expeditiously. At the fifty-first session of the Commission on Human Rights, Australia would participate in the establishment of an open-ended working group to that end.

21. Within the framework of the Decade, a permanent forum for indigenous people should also be established in the United Nations system. It would be extremely important to seek the views of indigenous peoples in that regard.

22. The Decade required effective planning and coordination. That would be ensured by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights, which should be given the human, financial and material resources necessary to fulfil those enormous responsibilities.

23. To that end, Governments which were in a position to do so could second staff, including indigenous staff, to the Centre. It would also be extremely helpful if those agencies which had not yet done so established focal points to facilitate coordination between the United Nations system and indigenous representatives.

24. The necessary financial resources must be provided to regional, national and international projects. Australia strongly encouraged Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to

contribute generously to the Voluntary Fund for the Decade to be established in early 1995.

25. Judging from the experience of the International Year, it would probably be difficult to attract major contributions for the Decade. However, Governments and agencies could expand or strengthen their activities relating to indigenous people within the framework of existing programmes. That would enable them to enhance the effectiveness of those programmes without having to mobilize additional financial resources.

26. At the national level, mechanisms for planning and implementing Decade activities must be established in close cooperation with Governments and indigenous groups. The establishment of national coordination committees and the consolidation of the concept of partnership, would respond to that need.

27. In Australia, the organization and follow-up of the activities of the Decade would be coordinated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The Commission was concerned, first and foremost, with the rights of indigenous peoples. In particular, it was making every effort to preserve the aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. In 1994, the planning of national and international activities had been discussed at meetings with members of the Commission, the main indigenous peoples' organizations and government agencies, which had been requested to undertake commitments in connection with the Decade.

28. Her delegation intended to submit a draft resolution to the General Assembly recommending, in particular, that the theme of the Decade should be "Indigenous peoples: partnership in action". It looked forward to holding constructive discussions with other delegations in that connection.

29. Mr. ROSENBERG (Ecuador) welcomed the proclamation of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, an initiative which would make it possible to assess the needs of indigenous people, devise practical measures to address the inequities to which they were subjected and give a fresh impetus to international cooperation in favour of indigenous people.

30. It was also encouraging to note that the situation of indigenous people was included in the agenda of the World Summit for Social Development, which the President of Ecuador had announced he would attend. In his delegation's view, the declaration and the programme of action to be adopted at the World Summit should aim at enhancing the involvement of indigenous people in the formulation and implementation of policies relating to them, while strictly respecting their cultural values, languages, traditions and particular forms of social integration.

31. His delegation believed that the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People constituted a vital element of the programme of work of the Decade. It also attached considerable importance to education and training as a means of ensuring greater involvement of indigenous people in the planning and

management of projects established for their benefit and thus of enhancing the efficiency of those projects.

32. His delegation also endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation that a body should be established to collect funds during the Decade, and it recognized the need to seek new sources of funding for programmes for indigenous people.

33. His delegation also supported the proposal regarding the establishment of a database and documentation centre on indigenous people. Such a source of information would be extremely useful in that it would permit a rapid and efficient analysis of questions relating to indigenous people. It would also help to preserve the history of those people and their traditions, which were full of wisdom and teaching of value to all. In Ecuador, several public and private bodies had taken steps with a view to establishing regional computerized networks and setting up a documentation centre on those issues. Such initiatives were in line with the projects envisaged for the Decade.

34. It was essential to strengthen the links between the indigenous communities and United Nations organizations in order to give the organizations a better understanding of the problems of indigenous people while putting the latter in a better position to reap maximum benefits from the services offered by the United Nations system.

35. His delegation urged the governing bodies of the organizations concerned to take due account of the specific needs of the indigenous people in their programmes. It would also appreciate more information on the content of the programmes which organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) intended to undertake for the benefit of indigenous people.

36. Ecuador was proud of its twofold heritage - Indian and Spanish. However, the cultural and ethnic differences which marked Ecuadorian society, of which the indigenous people formed an important part, should lead neither to the dismemberment of the territory nor to the abandonment by the State of its sovereignty over any part thereof. That territory was the common heritage of all citizens and its natural resources should be used for the economic and social development of the country as a whole, with due regard for the environment and with a view to enhancing the social structures for the benefit of all.

37. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/163, his Government had recently established the National Secretariat for Indigenous Affairs and Ethnic Minorities, which was attached to the Office of the President of the Republic. That body, which was composed of representatives of the indigenous people and headed by one of them, had engaged in an open dialogue with indigenous organizations, thus creating a climate conducive to the implementation of projects and the adoption of common measures. It also coordinated the

activities undertaken within the framework of the Decade, the goals of which Ecuador firmly supported.

38. Mr. RATA (New Zealand) said that the goal of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health. The success of the Decade would depend on the further development of the partnerships between Governments and indigenous people which had been successfully demonstrated during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. New Zealand wished to reaffirm its commitment to the goal of the Decade and its desire to contribute fully to international initiatives for the enhancement of the status of indigenous people throughout the world. On the national level, it would continue to defend the rights and concerns of the Maori people in accordance with the founding document of the country, the Treaty of Waitangi.

39. New Zealand extended its encouragement to all those involved in the activities of the Decade and emphasized the important role which the United Nations agencies had to play in that connection. Several of them had already expressed their willingness to consider how they could better take the interests of indigenous people into account in their areas of responsibility and how they could work with indigenous people to that end. The establishment of focal points within the various agencies pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in 1993 was very useful. The collection of data on the situation of indigenous people would provide a solid basis for planning. Moreover, New Zealand strongly supported the establishment of a unit for indigenous issues within the Centre for Human Rights. Finally, he emphasized the need to provide increased opportunities for indigenous people to participate directly in the resolution of problems facing them. That was essential if viable and sustainable solutions were to be found to such problems.

40. His Government had been guided by that philosophy in its relationship with the indigenous Maori people, with whom it had established a dynamic partnership on the basis of the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand was concerned about the development of the Maori community. Significant business and investment opportunities had emerged for iwi (tribal groupings) thanks largely to the initiative of the Maori themselves, who knew how to develop their natural resources. For its part, the Government was committed to improving the delivery of social services to the Maori in such areas as health, education and employment through the Ministry of Maori Development (Te Puni Kokiri).

41. His delegation was pleased to note that many countries had developed programmes of action for the Decade. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Maori Development would be coordinating the national programme for the Decade, which would begin officially on 13 December 1994 with the Proclamation of the Year of the Maori Language. Maori had been declared an official language in New Zealand in 1987 and the Government recognized that continued attention would help to ensure its survival. The Maori Language Commission was playing a key role in administering the programme of activities for the Year. The Government had also announced that it would allocate greater resources to immersion courses in the

Maori language, given the importance of language in preserving the identity, culture and lifestyle of indigenous people.

42. New Zealand wished to draw attention to the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. It firmly supported the adoption of a declaration which recognized the right of indigenous people to greater involvement in the determination of their economic and social destiny, and encouraged States to ensure that progress was made in the work on the draft declaration.

43. New Zealand wished to thank the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, in particular its Chairperson, Mrs. Daes, for her work on the draft declaration. As many had remarked, the participation of indigenous people in the preparation of the draft declaration had been extremely valuable. Now that the draft declaration had been referred to the Commission on Human Rights, Governments could begin negotiations on its content. New Zealand considered that the representatives of indigenous communities who had for so long participated in the sessions of the Working Group should also be involved in the discussions on the text.

44. New Zealand believed that the time had come to consider the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system. That proposal gave rise to a number of issues which should be taken up by both the indigenous people and Governments.

45. His delegation looked forward to participating in the launching of the Decade in the General Assembly and to a productive 10 years that would bring greater recognition and an improvement in the status of indigenous people throughout the world.

46. Mr. HAAKONSEN (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, welcomed the progress made in the preparations for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, as a result of the intensive consultations on the matter, particularly those held during the summer session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva and the Technical Meeting which had preceded it. He was also pleased to note that representatives of the indigenous people had been closely involved in that work. The preliminary report on a comprehensive programme of action for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People gave a full account of the preparatory process, in which the Nordic countries had actively participated.

47. The Decade was taking place within an ongoing process of the international political action on indigenous issues. That action should lead to the adoption of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and is the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples. Fortunately, there was every reason to believe that substantial progress would soon be made in those two areas. It was to be hoped that Governments would adopt a constructive attitude when examining the draft declaration during the forthcoming session of the Commission of Human Rights and that representatives of the indigenous communities would be allowed to play an active role in the discussions. The

establishment of a working group under the auspices of the Commission of Human Rights would help to ensure the early adoption of such a declaration.

48. With regard to the proposal for the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people, the Commission on Human Rights, at its fiftieth session, had adopted a resolution by consensus, the aim of which was to initiate a process of in-depth consultations and reflection on the issue between indigenous people and Governments. At its twelfth session in Geneva, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations had examined the proposal in detail. Continued dialogue seemed to be the only way in which a consensus could be achieved on that crucial issue. Pending the establishment of a permanent forum, the Nordic countries considered that the Working Group on Indigenous Populations should continue to play an active role in consultations and cooperation with indigenous peoples. They were also in favour of holding technical meetings on an annual basis in order to monitor progress made during the Decade. Such meetings might be organized in the different regions where indigenous communities lived.

49. The Nordic countries welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to allocate additional funds from the regular budget of the Organization for the indigenous people's unit in the Centre for Human Rights, so that it could be provided with the human and financial resources it urgently required. The fact that countries had seconded qualified indigenous staff to the Centre by no means reduced the need to provide the unit with a sound financial basis.

50. The Nordic countries also concurred with the Secretary-General on the need for further direct contact between specific United Nations organizations and indigenous peoples. In that connection, they strongly encouraged the Coordinator of the Decade to facilitate the establishment of such contacts so that the United Nations organizations would take into account the concerns of indigenous people in the planning and execution of programmes. The Nordic countries would make a special effort to ensure that the governing bodies of those organizations made the necessary budgetary allocations to implement programmes for indigenous communities.

51. The Nordic countries, which had been among the major contributors to the Voluntary Fund for the International Year, would continue their support for the Decade. They urged, however, that steps should be taken to increase the number of donors and to explore other sources of funding. The proposal in the Secretary-General's report (A/49/444) that a professional fund-raiser should be hired seemed to be worth pursuing.

52. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that, through the activities undertaken during the International Decade, it would no longer be possible to call indigenous people, as had so often been the case, the "forgotten peoples".

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.